

VZCZCXRO8004
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHEG #3123 2971318
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 241318Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7280
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS CAIRO 003123

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ELA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [EG](#) [XF](#)
SUBJECT: MUBARAK CLAIMS PROGRESS ON REFORM, CALLS FOR
"RESPONSIBLE FREEDOM"

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In an address marking the fifth anniversary of the opening of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, President Mubarak said Egypt has "gone a long way" on the road to reform. Compared to the 1970's, he said, Egyptians enjoy far greater freedoms now. However, he stressed, freedom is "both a responsibility and a commitment," and cannot be used as a cover to slander or encroach on the freedoms of others. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) In a speech marking the fifth anniversary of the opening of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina on October 23, President Mubarak focused on Egypt's political and economic reform program, noting that Egypt has made great strides, but that the road to reform would not be "full of roses." He said he was particularly concerned for Egypt's poorest, and was doing his utmost to protect them from adverse effects of a rapidly developing economy.

¶3. (SBU) Compared to the 1970's, Mubarak continued, "Egyptians enjoy unprecedented freedoms." Furthermore, he said, none of these advances could have been made without an environment of peace, security, and stability. Egyptians must realize, he stressed, that freedom is "both a responsibility and a commitment," and that "our freedom ends when it encroaches on the freedoms of others. Freedom of expression, opinion, and press does not mean we are free to slander others."

¶4. (SBU) Turning to Egypt's regional role, Mubarak said that there is a close link between Egypt's national security and that of the region as a whole. "Egypt's peace and stability hinges on the peace and stability of the entire Middle East." He added that Egypt is working towards the establishment of a "just regional peace" that would include an independent Palestinian state.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: According to emboff who was in the audience, Mubarak's tone was defensive, especially when comparing Egypt's freedoms of today with those of thirty years ago: "Where were the freedoms of expression and the press then? Where were the economic advances we enjoy today then?" He appeared to be addressing his critics at least as much as promoting positive achievements. Among those critics is the editor of Al-Dustour newspaper, Ibrahim Eissa, whose trial resumed today in Cairo on charges of spreading rumors about Mubarak's health. Mubarak's reference to Egypt's poor is also noteworthy in light of a recent UN report that showed a rise in the absolute poverty rate from 16.7 percent of the population, to 19.6 percent, from 2000 to 2005. As UN resident coordinator James Rawley put it, "One in every five Egyptians cannot meet their basic living needs."
RICCIARDONE